

Elixir of Love Synopsis

Time: 1910

Place: Lucca, Italy (Indy Opera version)

Act I

In a small Italian village, the lovesick Nemorino busily works at Adina's piazza café. He is head over heels for her, but Adina scoffs at love, laughing especially at the magical potion that binds Tristan and Isolde in the romance novel she's currently reading. Nemorino, ever the innocent, hears this and is sure that Adina would fall for him if only he could find a potion for himself.

Before Nemorino can muster up the nerve to confess his feelings for Adina, Sergeant Belcore arrives in town and quickly shows an interest in her. The moment Belcore leaves the café with his regiment, Nemorino pours out his feelings to Adina. She responds that they are totally incompatible; he wants to be attached, and she wants to be free like the wind. Nemorino runs off, desperate and heartbroken.

Suddenly, a commotion is stirred up as the villagers notice a vehicle approaching. It is "Doctor" Dulcamara, an itinerant snake oil salesman and all-around charlatan. Nemorino, seeing Dulcamara peddle his wares, thinks the Doctor might be able to help him find a love potion like Tristan and Isolde's. Dulcamara says that he has just the thing and gives specific instructions on how to use it, including the caution that its effects won't be seen until the next day (once Dulcamara has left town). Little does Nemorino know that the miracle elixir is nothing more than a bottle of Bordeaux.

With newfound confidence in his cure-all, Nemorino's inhibitions melt away and Adina is perplexed by this sea change she sees in him. His confidence soon withers though as Belcore comes searching for Adina. Belcore offers to marry Adina, and she wanting to needle Nemorino, accepts his offer, agreeing to marry within the week. Nemorino laughs at this news as he believes that the love potion will take effect tomorrow, before the couple can be united, ruining their plans.

However, word arrives that Belcore and his men are due to ship out the following morning. Adina ups the ante by saying she will marry Belcore that very night. Nemorino despairs, thinking his potion won't take effect in time to stop the imminent wedding.

Act II

That evening, the entire village celebrates the nuptials of Adina and Belcore. Adina is annoyed that her ploy has not worked as Nemorino has not come yet to try to stop her. Nemorino arrives just as the townsfolk depart, seeking out Dulcamara to beg for more elixir. Dulcamara requires the money to complete the transaction, but Nemorino confesses that he has nothing left. For Dulcamara, no dough, no deal.

To Nemorino's good fortune, Belcore stumbles by and asks what has the boy so troubled. Nemorino complains of his need for money, and Belcore senses an opportunity to sidetrack his rival by having him enlist. Nemorino jumps at the opportunity to get a signing bonus, and with a simple cross mark on the dotted line, joins up. Now with ready cash in hand, Nemorino runs to find Dulcamara.

Giannetta shares some juicy gossip with the other townswomen that Nemorino's uncle has passed and has left him a massive fortune. Each lady imagines herself as Nemorino's next suitor. Nemorino then re enters, having clearly enjoyed a great deal more 'elixir,' and finds himself suddenly surrounded by many interested ladies. He assumes the potion must be doing its job.

Adina happens by and sees Nemorino surrounded by the women. She is perplexed how such a thing might have happened. She asks Dulcamara, and he informs her that Nemorino gave up everything he had to sign up for the army and spent his bonus money on a love potion that would win the heart of someone who wouldn't love him back. Adina realizes how sincere Nemorino has been in his affection for her and rushes off.

Nemorino catches a glimpse of her as she leaves, seeing in her eye a furtive tear. He believes it is a sign of her love for him. Adina re enters and asks why he has joined the army. Nemorino tells her that he intends to lead an honorable life. However, Adina reveals that she has bought off his contract and asks him instead to stay home. Nemorino says he will not remain unless she tells him she loves him, otherwise he will go to war and die in battle. She finally reveals her true feelings for him and the two joyfully embrace. Belcore angrily discovers the newfound lovers, but Dulcamara, sensing a sales opportunity, uses Nemorino and Adina's successful coupling as a testament to the Power of his new Elixir of Love.

Director's Notes by A. Scott Perry

The Elixir of Love is best known for its world-famous tenor aria “Una furtiva lagrima” (One furtive tear). As the show’s 11 o’clock number, it signals a turning point for this melodrama giocoso (playful music-drama) from the comedic to the sentimental, allowing it to be not simply a buffa (comedy) or a seria (tragedy) but something mixed and in-between. Elixir so charmingly disarms because it allows us to breezily get to know certain archetypal characters: a bumbling simpleton youth, a chilly and powerful ingenue, a stuffed-shirt tin soldier, and a quack snake-oil salesman. But it then takes their interrelationships, which seem stock on the surface, and gives us a glimpse under the hood to witness real flesh and blood human beings working and struggling beneath. It is a triumph of hopeful sincerity when one least expects it, and such a surprise carries us away with the core truth of it. We all have known these feelings ourselves and can honestly connect to this story of coming to terms with one’s feelings and those of whom we love. Astonishingly written in a mere six weeks, Elixir stands as a testament to the instinctual brilliance of Donizetti who so genuinely captures the joys and heartaches of humanity in a seeming trifle of a piece, but one that has stood the test of time as his most produced work and ubiquitous the whole world over.

Notes from the Indianapolis Opera

The classical arts and opera companies are always looking for ways to engage general audiences in a way that breaks down the barriers of opera. What better way in Indianapolis is there for opera and the general public to come together than racing? The International world of motorsports and the international world of opera have been around for over 100 years and every May race fans from around the world take over the town, and we’re hoping to bring some of that passion back during our production of Elixir of Love by Donizetti.

Our production updates the setting of Donizetti’s opera to the turn of the century in Lucca, Italy. The end of the 19th century going into the 20th brought many important advances in industry, but among some of the most important inventions was the automobile. By the 1910s - when our story is set - inventors began to standardize many design and safety concepts, and vehicles became a more common novelty. For absolute authenticity, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum is helping to present an authentic 1910 Maxwell race car from this period on the stage of the Tarkington in Carmel.

The car in our story has a dazzling effect on the townspeople in the more remote, Renaissanceera town of Lucca, Italy. The chorus of towns folks are awestruck as a car is pushed in by a stranger from out of town. As the stranger, who is a racing hobbyist, begins to weave his tale to swindle the money out of the town, he boasts of how he has a miracle "Elixir" that can solve all of their problems (LOVE). The townspeople take the bait and buy out his entire stock of fake wine, ensuring he can buy enough fuel to return to his racing habit.

Lucca shares another commonality with another Indianapolis fixture and racing legend: Mario Andretti. Mario and his family came to Lucca as refugees at the conclusion to World War II, before later moving to the United States. It is in Lucca where Mario was introduced to racing and opera, which became a part of his historic journey of becoming one of the Indianapolis 500's most legendary winners.

Whether it's racing or Italian culture or love or comedy, our production of Elixir of Love has something for everyone. More importantly, it ties into the community that we love here and pays homage to one of the great racing legends in our city. It is sung in Italian, and was presented at the Tarkington Theatre in Carmel, Indiana.